Give me the child until he is seven, and I will show you the man – childhood around the world in Seven up

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Abstract: [My lecture] will focus on the longitudinal documentary Seven Up and its international follow-ups. [...] While documentary filmmakers already began to use the term «longitudinal studies» for their own projects in the early 1980s, the term «longitudinal documentary» (or long doc) was prominently introduced to film studies by Richard Kilborn and his book Taking the Long View in 2010. Two projects in particular are repeatedly considered as pivotal: The Children of Golzow, (or Die Kinder von Golzow), an East German documentary series by Winfried and Barbara Junge about children from a village in Brandenburg close to Berlin that began in 1961 and finished in 2007; and the British documentary series Up which started in 1964 with the film Seven Up and follows the lives of 14 British children.

«Give Me the Child Until He is Seven, and I Will Show You the Man» – Childhood around the world in *Seven Up*

Thank you very much for the kind introduction and also thank you to the organizers for giving me the opportunity to speak here today!

In my following lecture I will focus on the longitudinal documentary *Seven Up* and its international follow-ups. Britta already introduced us to the concept and shared characteristics of longitudinal documentaries, so I will keep the definition short on my part. While documentary filmmakers already began to use the term «longitudinal studies» for their own projects in the early 1980s, the term «longitudinal documentary» (or long doc) was prominently introduced to film studies by Richard Kilborn and his book *Taking the Long View* in 2010.

Two projects in particular are repeatedly considered as pivotal: *The Children of Golzow*, (or *Die Kinder von Golzow*), an East German documentary series by Winfried and Barbara Junge about children from a village in Brandenburg close to Berlin that began in 1961 and finished in 2007; and the British documentary series *Up* which started in 1964 with the film *Seven Up* and follows the lives of 14 British children. To avoid confusion, I will refer to the whole film project as *the Up-Series* from now on, and use *Seven Up* for the first film of the series only.

Michael Apted, who at first worked as a researcher for *Seven Up*, then replaced Paul Almond as director for *Seven plus Seven,* the second film of the series in 1972. Since then, he has released a new film every seventh year, with the most recent installment being *56 Up* in 2012. The next instalment *62 Up* is scheduled to be released in 2019, making the *Up*-Series the longest running documentary in television history. For Michael Apted himself, born in 1941, there is no end in sight for the series. He says – and I quote: «I hope to do *84Up* when I'll be 99.»[1]

In the early 1990s, the idea of *Seven Up* ended up being detached from its national British context and got adapted in order to show the everyday life of children around the world. International versions for South Africa, the Soviet Union, (Germany), Japan and the United States were initiated.

[1] http://www.onthemedia.org/story/261818-up-series-56/transcript

The original *Up-Series* became a predecessor for long docs over the past decades, taking on a significant role in the British film history, whereas research on the new versions of the format still remains absent.

Furthermore, the fact that the initial concept of *Seven Up* was adapted for other countries poses interesting questions: do these long docs from different countries use different aesthetics or narrative strategies to portray childhood? In what way do they function as documents of societal or historical change? To what extent do they function as ethnographic works? And who is the targeted audience?

In order to gain insight into the history of *Up* as a documentary series it is necessary to talk about the broadcaster Granada Television and their TV program *World in Action*, within which *Seven Up* - the very first film of the series – was aired.

Granada, an independent television broadcaster for North West England known for their left-leaning political agenda at the time, launched *World in Action* on January 7th 1963 as a current affairs program. It was intended to oppose against already established and moderate TV-formats and to deal with both the ongoing public concerns and the rapid changes that were becoming visible in Britain during the early 1960s. In his examination of the *Up*-Series, Richard Kilborn calls *World in Action* a – and I quote - «hard-hitting investigative programme that […] was broadly sociological in its aim» (Kilborn 2010: 32).

A key figure of the early days of *World in Action* was Tim Hewat, an Australian journalist who had joined Granada in 1957 after working for the *Daily Express* and who was now given the job of first series editor. Michael Apted, one of two researchers for *Seven Up* at the time (and as I mentioned before, the director of every episode that followed *Seven Up*), described Hewat's impact on the tone of the format a lot more direct than Kilborn did: «It was largely Hewat who reinvented current affairs and documentaries in the early sixties. He put tabloid journalisms on television. […]. His output was peppered with urgent and racy subject matter. […] Noicy, vulgar, quick-witted and of the moment.» (Quoted in Lewis and Davis, 1991:6) .

It was then Hewat who came up with the idea to create a program that portrayed the societal changes eminent at the time by focusing on a group of Seven Year Olds from different social backgrounds. He based his idea on the Jesuit maxim *Give me the child until he is seven and I will give you the man.*

It is notable that while *Seven Up* runs in a program that is called *World in Action*, it is clearly framed as a project that presents an exclusive insight into the daily life of the *British* children. It is a *British* documentary dealing with *British* affairs intended for a *British* audience. Nevertheless, it does (at least partially) provide an outsider's perspective on British society. Following the experiences of Tim Hewat as an Australian, as a migrant that was shocked by the rigidity of the social class system in Britain, the project refuses a state-friendly depiction of society.

As Stella Bruzzi underlines, the first film of the *Up*-Series with its unique aesthetics and topic cannot be called a classic *World in Action* segment. However, it does align with the rest of the program in regard to its critical view on British society at the time.

Consequently, the initial idea of *Seven Up* arose from Hewats plan to produce a documentary that illustrates the inequalities within the British class system. Moreover, this became the premise of the first film and played a huge role in the casting of the children as well. Gordon MacDougall, one of Apted's coworkers, summarizes Hewats bolt and polarizing pitch for the project in his own words. «If I am making this show, I start with the camera up here and twenty children down in the square. Voice over: Here are twenty children, these five are going to be winners. Zoom in. These fifteen are going to be losers. Zoom in. Now we are going to show you why.» (Kilborn 2010: 51).

The short quote underlines the populist intention of the program as well as Hewats aim to use it to unveil social injustice. Clearly, *Seven Up* was framed as a sociological project from the get go and started off with a highly deterministic premise.

I want to take the chance and show you the first few minutes of *Seven Up* in order to gain insight into how the film presents these children:

Clip1: Seven Up (5:00 min.)

These first few minutes show, that the film is primarily concerned with the effects the class system has on these children. The narrator introduces the children, and I quote: «they are like any other children, except that they come from strikingly different social backgrounds». The first few minutes continue on to show a contrasting montage, juxtaposing the everyday lives of the children, but also urban and rural, rich and poor neighborhoods.

The film presents a portrait of childhood, yet it also sets up its own sociological aim: showing the viewer how social classes seem to form and predict the lives of the selected children. This presumption about the possible life paths these children will take can be connected to the aforementioned Jesuit saying and suggests that this examination of the children makes it already possible to draw conclusions on how they will turn out as adults. It could be said that at this very early stage, a Life Narrative is already being established.

This anticipatory understanding and approach is criticized by Mitchell Duneier who calls the series a: Quote «ethical folk psychology rather than sociological analysis» (Duneier 2009:344), therefore criticizing the reductionistic approach towards the young social actors. Barrie Thorne on the other hand argues that as the series proceeds, subsequent episodes reasses the assumptions made in *Seven Up and* connect the personal life stories with the sociological examinations, therefore turning the project into a valuable scientific resource, and I quote: «The films demonstrate a point that sociologists all too often tend to forget: each individual is unique, with a distinctive personality. […] Watching each person move through time, with enough interaction to get a feel for their distinctive personalities, raises many questions not only about unique persons in relation to the social, but also about the (dis)continuity of selves over time.» (Thorne 2009:330)

It is interesting to note that *although* the project was not intended to turn into a long doc, the Jesuit maxim and with it its deterministic premise ought to become a key factor for the filmic form of the series. I want to argue that the maxim was used to produce a certain kind of *continuity* in the construction of the selves of the social actors since further installments keep coming back to this initial material and to the Seven-Year-Olds in order to compare what has changed since then. This strategy is repeatedly used by

long docs and Richard Kilborn calls it the «time shuttle», meaning a traveling from the past to the present and then (on that ground) making assumptions about the future.

While this effect certainly evokes a strong response and urges on self-examination on the audience's side, it also refers to the ability of the moving image to preserve bodily appearances. It captures the passage of time and within the moving image transforms it into an explicitly filmic time. An ability that was perhaps best emphasized by André Bazins idea of *Change Mummified* in the Ontology of the Moving Image.

In addition, these moments of Going-Back in time suggest a reflection on the filmic format of the *Up-Series* in general. As the filmic format changes from a sociological to a more biographical approach, it is interesting to see that the interpretive sovereignty about how exactly these lives should be portrayed comes into focus. *Seven Up* and the portrayed childhood remain as reference points within these lively discussions that take place throughout the episodes.

Back to *Seven Ups* approach to childhood. Apart from the sociological approach, it can be argued that *Seven Up* also presents itself as an ethnographic project. It observes something that is familiar (specifically to the British audience of the time), and yet also (at the same time) achieves to additionally observe it as Unknown, something Other.

In his ethnographic ambitions, *Seven Up* observes the children from an outsider's point of view and follows them on a typical school day. Interestingly, the film at points exceeds this perspective and very briefly tries to get a glimpse of the children's inner world, their experiences of what it is like being a 7-year old – the most striking visual example of the latter being a shaky point of view of Tony in which he runs to school trying not to be late for class.

So apart from the deterministic premise, the film also shows repeated interest in the individual lives of the children. The children get asked personal questions, for example what they like to do in their spare time. We also see the children living their daily routine – although when we do, everyday life is always being closely linked to the educational system. We see the children on their way to school, we see them in class and we see them doing group activities with their peers.

Seven Up predominantly connects everyday life experiences with a broader societal context. In the interviews, the children are asked about freedom and discipline, about race, money and education, some of these rather abstract subjects for Seven-Year-Olds. The statements in these cases then hint more towards an attempt to underline Hewats premise and to unveil societal factors that influence childhood in general. In these moments, contrasting social backgrounds - it seems - matters more than the individual life-stories or the exploration of daily rituals. In the end, *Seven Up* works as both: a sociological attempt to unveil the British class system as well as an ethnographic work that at times tries to give the viewer insight into the everyday life of British Seven-Year-Olds.

Following the international success of the format in the 1980s, it was no coincidence that in the early 1990s, Granada produced new versions of the original *Seven Up* program for Russia, South Africa, Germany, Japan and America. These versions differ more or less from the original British version. *Age 7 in America* for example, despite using an introduction statement by actress Meryl Streep to set up the program, works as a, and I quote Stella Bruzzi «American repackaging of Seven Up» (Bruzzi 2007: 18), closely following the premise and the contrasting montage of the British original, even going so far as to presumably use the same criteria for the casting of the children. For example, the three upper class boys from the original you saw earlier in the clip are (in this installment) replaced by three girls who are also used as an example of (children with) a rich social background.

The South African version differs more clearly from the original and focuses on certain local areas around Johannesburg, while predominately observing how racial segregation has affected the life of the children. While this would also be an interesting example to further examine, I will focus on the Version about the Soviet Union for the rest of my paper.

Born in the USSR: 7 Up, is the first of four installments so far (the latest one being *28 Up* from 2012) and is directed by Sergei Miroshnichenko, a Russian filmmaker who prior to the first film (had) lived for several years in the UK. Again, I want to show you the first few minutes of the film:

Clip 2: 1:20 min

Much like the original *Seven Up*, the film sets up contrasts between rich and poor, urban and rural areas, and spans a geographical map from Lithuania to Georgia all the way to Kirghizia. What differentiates it from the original however, is the historical background of the project: the film is clearly framed as an attempt to observe the consequences of the downfall of the Soviet Union. As we see in the clip, it does so for example by using the music school as analogy for the disparate parts of the Union. When we see the camera zoom in on one of the children's faces during the orchestra performance, we see that premise being clearly visualized: the audience is about to experience history through the experiences these children

Is *7 Up USSR* also still an ethnographic work? Yes, I would argue it is, but with the additional objective to inform an international, (western) audience. The film aims to confront a western audience with a foreign culture and tries to educate the viewer on what is going on in an almost journalistic way, an approach emphasized by the voice-over that repeatedly gives information on the historical background of the time. However, the film also tries to depict the experience of growing up as a child on a more general level. It views a foreign culture within a framework meant for a western audience, and at times combines it with an universalist view on childhood and its everyday rituals.

It is also interesting to know that Granada Television, once a regional program, has since become part of the Global TV-Network ITV. The network supplies TV channels with content intended for audiences of various countries and produces programs all over the world. Regarding *Up USSR*, it is also important to mention that for *21 Up USSR*, two versions were created: a shorter one that aired on ITV in Britain and a significantly longer version that was shown on Russian Television, further complicating the question of the targeted audience.

Looking at *Up USSR* and *Up South Africa*, it is striking to observe that both long docs focus on regions that were faced with even more drastic societal changes than the original. This fact adds a new dimension to these projects in comparison to the original film and in the case of the former Soviet Union, it results in a new measurement of national borders and a diversification of national identities.

While the two new *Up*-Version were initiated to document these changes, it is also interesting to see that at the same time the 'Mauerfall' in Germany changed the status of long docs from the GDR like the aforementioned *The Children of Golzow* sustainably.

Only after this drastic historical event were these projects regarded as some of the most valuable documentary records of (East-)German history, offering the most valuable insights into the question of historical change from a long-term perspective. Their unique historiographical potential is characterized by what I call *history from below* (because it appropriates history through the experiences and daily lives of 'ordinary' people rather than focusing on official representatives or institutions) and «history from within» (because it cumulates footage from before, during and after the 'Mauerfall', offering a differentiated and comprehensive insight into the historical changes.) It sets up a «history from the margins» that differs from common historic narratives about that time period in German History. Ultimately these projects cumulate time capsules of present moments that forgather in the longitudinal character of the project rather than retrospectively dealing with historical change, therefore offering a unique approach towards history.

Although *Up USSR* fails to depict the time *before* Perestroika, it does confront the children with the dramatic historical change they are experiencing in the moment of the initiation and therefore succeeds in setting the premise for their very own program.

The Jesuit Saying of the original is being briefly quoted here as well, however, the core of the film is arguably the everyday lives of the children that inhabit a translated observation of a historically significant moment.

What they experience is then defined as extra-ordinary, as examples of lives that changed on a fundamental level and that were being filmed in the very moment it happened. Here, childhood is understood as growing up amidst drastic *historical* changes. I want to show you a short clip before I end:

Clip 3: 1:00 min

Aysa, one of the children being interviewed here, reacts rather frustrated when she is connected to and is asked about the imminent changes that are happening on a historical level. At the same time however, she seems very aware of them and has pretty clear ideas about her plans for the future. In connecting the Personal with the Historical, *Up USSR* exceeds the sociological dimension of the original and in this sense seems more closely connected to long docs of the GDR, making it a valuable *historical* document in times of great change.